THE PROBLEMS OF URDU LANGUAGE AND SCRIPT

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THERE was a time when Urdu was dubbed as a foreign language and Mahatama Gandhi had to assert over and over again. "English is a foreign language but such is not the case with Urdu. I am proud of the fact that Urdu is a language born in India and it belongs to India."

There also came a time when for political expediency the secular nature of this language was over emphasized, as if it was necessary for establishing its bonafides in this country.

The true nature of Urdu language.

It is a misfortune that Urdu had been a toy in the hands of the politicians, who neither cared to know the circumstances of its birth nor had the capacity to understand its mixed structure. Urdu is, in the truest sense of this linguistic term, a 'mixed' language. It grew out of the confrontation of the two great civilizations, the Islamic and the Hindu. The Islamic civilization, in this context was represented by the Turks, the Afgans and the Persians. It had its linguistic spearhead in Arabic. The linguistic spearhead of the Hindu civilization was, of course, Sanskrit. In India, notwithstanding the Arab inroads in Sind during the 8th Century and Turks-Afgan conquest of the Panjab in the 11th Century, the real confrontation began at the beginning of the 13th Century with the establishment of a Muslim Empire in Delhi. Soon the first linguistic contact bore fruit and a mixed idiom got currency under the name of Hindi, Hindavi and Zaban-i-Dehlavi. Amir Khusrau, who died in 1325 was its first authentic bard. Deccan came under the sway of the Delhi Sultans in the early parts of the 14th Century. Zaban-i-Dehlavi was carried to the lands of Marathi, Telugu, and Kannada, by the Muslim conquerors. Soon afterwards Deccan won its independence under the Bahmanis in 1347 A.D. Urdu was first used for religious and literary purposes in Deccan from 1460 onwards, the

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language was known to Deccani writers as Hindi, Hindavi, Zaban-i-Hindustan and finally Dakani and Dakhani, besides being remembered by the Deccani speakers of other languages as 'Turka Mata' and Musalmani.

The following few points need to be stressed about the Origin and Development of Urdu:

(1) Urdu contained Perso-Arabic elements in its structure from the very beginning, although it is based on an Indo-Aryan dialect spoken round about Delhi.

(2) The linguistic elements permeate Urdu through all its levels:

- (a) Phonological : the incorporation in its sound-system of such loan phonemes as *kh*, *gh*, q, f, Z, and Ẓ
- (b) Morphology : the "wao-atf" and "izafat" and feminine and plural forms of Perso- Arabic grammar.
- (c) Syntax : The arrangement and construction of Urdu sentences on the patterns of Persian and Arbic Syntax. (The Problem of "Kaf-i-bayania.")
- (d) Lexican : The thousands of words of Arabic and Persian Origin.
- (e) Orthography : Urdu script is an extended form of Perso-Arabic script. This script has been employed for this language from the very beginning.

(3) The leadership in the development of Urdu language has always been in the Muslim hands. There is hardly any non-Muslim writer worth-mentioning in the three hundred years of the development of this language in Deccan. The significant non-Muslim writers appeared only by the middle of the 19th Century. In the 20th Century writers like Prem Chand, Krishna Chandra and Rajendra Singh Bedi dominated the Urdu fiction, still the leadership remained with the Muslims, specially for their contributrion to build up a Urdu University (Jamia Osmania) and create Urdu terminologies for Higher Education.

(4) Urdu literature, especially poetry breathes with Muslim culture and Muslim traditions. The complaint of such Urdu writers, as Raghupati Sahai "Firaq" contains elements of truth when he says that this language lacks in "Hindu Sanskriti."

The Confrontation of Urdu and Hindi

A language so constituted and having such a history is surely interwoven very closely with the political and social life of the Indian Muslims. During the 18th and the early part of the 19th Century, the North Indian urban population of the non-Muslims also accepted it as their official and cultural language. But with the firm establishment of the British Raj the situation began to change immediately after the up-heaval of 1857. Agitation against Urdu and its Script by certain organizations of Banaras came as a rude shock to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in 1869, who for the first expressed his horror, that it is now impossible for Hindus and Muslims to pull together. All through the second half of the 19th Century the opposition to Urdu grew stronger reaching its climax in the first two decades of the 20th Century. For a while, under the leadership of Mahatama Gandhi the concept of a "Sangam language" (Hindustani in both Scripts) prevailed. The ideal began to crack even before India won freedom and it vanished the very day India was free and Mahatamaji was dead.

Present Situation

In free India, Urdu is just one of the languages mentioned in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. It is like a Prince with titles but no state. Although the total number of its speakers is to the extent of 25 millions, they do not form a majority in a *single district* of any one of the States of India. In spite of representations no State is coming forward to adopt a foster child. There is a planned extermination of its educational system in States like U.P. and Bihar. There is total negligence and indifference in States like Andhra, Mysore and Maharashtra. The result is, that its educational system has collapsed completely with no High Schools, no Colleges, no Teachers Training Colleges, no text-books and in certain areas no students of Urdu. There are only three institutions of higher learning who can cater to the needs of Urdu speech-community—Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Millia and the Urdu College of Hyderabad. But they have no feeder institutions. The result is that Aligarh is shielding itself under the cover of English, the other two are in search of students who want to be taught through the Urdu medium.

There is no room for a prophecy in the analysis of a linguistic situation such as that of Urdu in India. Urdu is still a living language.

It is one of the major languages of India from the point of view of numbers (the sixth largest language). From the point of view of circulation of its news-papers, currency in the market place, hold on the films, it is again a major language of India. However, a language can not gain its full stature unless used for official and educational purposes, otherwise it will dwindle down to a dialect. The new generation of Urdu speakers is constantly crossing over to the other regional languages, sometimes by force of circumstances and sometimes willingly. The non-Muslim families of Urdu Speakers have crossed over to Hindi almost completely. The Muslim rural population likewise has taken to Hindi or other regional languages. It is only the urban Urdu speakers who are putting up a *loosing* fight.

It is interesting that religious Muslim organizations (like Jamat-e-Islami) do not consider Urdu as an essential feature of Indian Islam. They have begun to produce religious literature in Hindi as well. Their main concern is Islam not Urdu.

There are also Muslim writers of Urdu, who would like to adopt Devanagri Script for Urdu. Again they are mainly concerned with the language-contents and not its outer structure. There would then hardly be any justification for keeping Urdu as a separate language in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution if its present script is given up in favour of Devanagri.

Concluding Remarks

Reflecting on the present linguistic situation I would like to underline the following points:

1. There is an imminent danger of the total collapse of the Urdu Educational System.
2. Organization on a voluntary basis of the Urdu Primary Schools is no solution for saving this language as a medium of instruction. The educational system should be built up at all levels of Secondary, Higher Secondary and College education, culminating in the establishment of several Urdu Universities.
3. The Central Government has recently allotted to Urdu a sum of rupees one crore for the preparation of text-books for University education. No doubt text-books are important, but more important are the institutions and the students who will use these books. They are not at present available.

4. The total destruction of Urdu, will have deep psychological and sociological repercussions and reactions on the Muslim Community of India. It is difficult to agree with the Jamat-e-Islami that the inner core of a culture is the set of beliefs which a community holds. The exterieurs of civilization like language are as important; whose destruction is the best way to make a community or a nation a non-entitly.

5. The script of Urdu is its natural rampart. It is more so if another dominant language is close by to absorb it. We can reform it but can not discard it.

6. The Urdu Speech-Community's fight for its language is to be commended on two grounds : (a) Its younger generation will have a breathing space for adjustment (b) It will tone down the regressive movements of modern Hindi, as is evident by recent literary trends.

7. In the present linguistics situation, I am very apprehensive of the survival of Urdu as a fullfledged language. The younger generation of Urdu speakers has already become bi-lingual. This bi-lingualism will lead to mono lingualism in the next generation. The extermination of Urdu from the Indian scene will not only have deep sociological influence on the Muslim Community; even looked from a national point of view, it will be a tremendous loss to the Indian Nation if a very extensive section of its people is made deaf and dumb by putting seals of linguistic extermination on their lips and ears. The care of Urdu is justifiable not only on a communal basis but on a national ground as well.

8. The only hope of the survival of this language lies :
   (a) in the linguistic ego and conciousness of the community that speaks this language and value it for their culture.
   (b) in the constructive efforts of this speech-community in establishing Urdu educational institutions.
   (c) in a fair deal on behalf of the linguistic majorities in the States of U.P., Bihar, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Mysore and Maharashtra.
   (d) in the Constitutional directive of the President of India to make it a second official language in U.P., Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi etc.

(e) as well setting up of a high power Board under the Central Ministry of Education to look after the affairs of Urdu at all levels.

Among the items mentioned above, the first item i.e. the development of the linguistic ego in the Urdu Speech-Community is of utmost importance. It presupposes a pride in their past; a desire to preserve what has been achieved culturally and linguistically during the medieval period of the history; it above all urges towards a total refusal of the linguistic phenomena thrusted upon them by the language revivalists. There is no doubt we have entered an arena of total confrontation between the Revivalists and the Modernists. The battle is to be fought not only on the political front but on the cultural and linguistic fronts as well. It is ordained for the Urdu Speech-Community to throw their lot with those whose definition of national integration contain within itself the many-sided splendour of the history. The survival of Urdu in India is linked up this concept of Indian nationhood. Urdu language provides a kind of test for the secular forces of this country. If they fail to protect and preserve the linguistic minorities it will signal the final victory of the forces of darkness.

Among the Urdu Speech-Community there are people who believe that the preservation of religious beliefs is more important than the preservation of the medium in which they are expressed. For the "meaning" is more important than the phonetic entity of the "word" or linguistic structure. But today we know that language is a 'structure' and the most important aspect of human behaviour. It is personality in motion. To deprive a speech-community of this personality 'or behaviour is to cut at the roots of its culture. It is for this reason that an awakening of the linguistic ego of the Urdu Speech-Community should precedes all talk of reorganization of this community on a linguistic basis. Preserve the language and it will 'follow like right the day' that all the beliefs and ideals cherished by the speaker of this language are saved for all times to come.